

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 HA-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10
NSAE-00 PA-02 SP-02 SS-15 NSC-05 IO-14 /066 W
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R 070945Z SEP 78
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0611
INFO USICA WASHDC

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FOR EA

E.O. 11652: NA
SUBJ: FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS IN THAILAND RESPOND TO JACK
ANDERSON REFUGEE COLUMN

1. HEREWITH TEXT OF CABLE SENT BY FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS
CLUB OF THAILAND SEPTEMBER 1 TO WASHINGTON POST IN
REBUTTAL OF JACK ANDERSON'S AUGUST 15 COLUMN ON THAI
TREATMENT OF CAMBODIAN REFUGEES.

2. JACK ANDERSON HAS AN ADMIRABLE AND WELL DESERVED
REPUTATION FOR EXPOSING MUCH OF THE HUMBUG AND INJUSTICE
CHARACTERISTIC OF GOVERNMENTS NOT ONLY IN HIS OWN COUNTRY
BUT IN THIS PART OF THE WORLD AS WELL.

3. BUT HIS AIM MAY HAVE BEEN A BIT OFF WHEN HE LEVELED
AGAINST THE THAI GOVERNMENT IN HIS AUGUST 15TH COLUMN,
"MISERY AND TORMENT FOR CAMBODIANS," AN ARTICLE WHICH
LEFT THE MISLEADING IMPRESSION THAT KHMER REFUGEES FACE
A REGIME OF TERROR IN THAI CAMPS ALMOST INDISTINGUISHABLE
FROM THAT WHICH FORCED THEM FROM THEIR HOMELAND IN THE
FIRST PLACE.

4. IT IS NOT INCONCEIVABLE THAT ONE THOUSAND KHMER
REFUGEES HAVE BEEN GUNNED DOWN AT THE BORDER BETWEEN
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JULY 1977 AND FEBRUARY THIS YEAR, AS ALLEGED BY MR
ANDERSON'S SOURCES, APPARENTLY CAMBODIANS NOW IN THE
UNITED STATES. BUT IT'S IN THE VERY NATURE OF THINGS
THAT THIS SORT OF FIGURE IS TOTALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO
DETERMINE ACCURATELY. AND MR ANDERSON NEGLECTS TO MENTION
THAT A VIRTUAL STATE OF WAR PREVAILS THE LENGTH OF THAT
BORDER, AGGRAVATED BY RECURRENT AND SAVAGE ATTACKS ON

THAI BORDER VILLAGES AND CONFUSED BY ARMED SMUGGLERS AND
OPPOSING GUERRILLA FORCES ON BOTH SIDES.

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5. TO POINT OUT THAT AN UNKNOWN NUMBER OF INNOCENT
REFUGEES SHOULD BE THE VICTIMS OF BORDER TENSIONS
IS NOT TO CONDONE THEIR DEATHS. BUT MR. ANDERSON'S
IMPLICIT ARGUMENT THAT SUCH IS A MATTER OF GOVERNMENT
POLICY IS HARDLY SUBSTANTIATED BY THE FACT THAT THE
FLOW OF CAMBODIAN REFUGEES TO THAILAND HAS INCREASED
DRAMATICALLY OVER THE PAST MONTHS WHERE THE MILITARY
CONFRONTATION ALONG THE BORDER HAS RELAXED. THE CURRENT
INFLUX OF KHMER REFUGEES TO THAILAND IS NOT FORTY A
MONTH, AS MR. ANDERSON INFORMS US, BUT OVER FOUR
HUNDRED SINCE THE LATTER HALF OF JULY.

6. CERTAINLY INDIVIDUAL CAMP COMMANDERS MAY WELL HAVE
BEEN NASTY, BRUTISH AND ARBITRARY, AND THE UGLY SORTS
OF EPISODES MR. ANDERSON DECRIMES NO DOUBT OCCUR. THE
DEPENDENT AND HELPLESS STATUS OF REFUGEES IS PARTICULARLY
ACUTE IN THE BURIRAM DETENTION CENTER WHERE CURRENTLY
A FEW HUNDRED OF THE FIFTEEN THOUSAND KHMER REFUGEES
ARE DETAINED AS SUSPECT AGENTS OR ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS.
BUT THERE ARE LARGE AREAS OF THE COUNTRY WHERE EVEN THAI
CITIZENS ALSO SUFFER FROM THE PETTY TYRANNY OF LOCAL
OFFICIALS. AND IT SHOULD NOT BE FORGOTTEN THAT
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THAILAND'S POLICY OF ALLOWING THE GREAT MAJORITY OF
REFUGEES TO COME HERE IN THE FIRST PLACE HAS BEEN
CONSISTENT AND HUMANE, DESPITE HISTORICAL ANTAGONISM
THAT WOULD MAKE DEEP SUSPICION OF ANY MASS INFLUX OF
PEOPLE FROM INDOCHINA UNDERSTANDABLE.

7. MOREOVER, THE THAI REFUGEE CAMPS ARE OPEN TO FOREIGN
CORRESPONDENTS, DIPLOMATS AND UNITED NATIONS OFFICIALS.
IF THERE WERE A SYSTEMATIC POLICY OF INTIMIDATION,
CORRUPTION, WHITE SLAVERY OR INDENTURED LABOUR WE WOULD
KNOW ABOUT IT. AND CONTRARY TO MR ANDERSON'S INFORMANTS,
NO CONCERNED OBSERVER KNOWS OF ANY INCIDENT WHERE A CAMP
COMMANDER HAS THE AUTHORITY OR POWER TO SENTENCE ANYONE
TO LIFE IMPRISONMENT.

8. THE SINGLE MOST DISTRESSING CAUSE OF THE UTTER DES-
PONDENCY THAT PREVAILS AMONG THE CAMBODIANS IN THAI
REFUGEE CAMPS IS NOT THE OCCASIONAL DRUNKEN GUARD, AS
MUCH AS THE DEPRESSING REALIZATION THAT MOST OF THE WORLD
HAS FORGOTTEN ABOUT THEM AND THEY HAVE NO WHERE TO GO.

9. I APPLAUD MR ANDERSON'S EFFORTS TO REMIND THE AMERICAN
PUBLIC THAT THE DEPLORABLE DILEMMA OF CAMBODIAN REFUGEES

IS HARDLY RESOLVED ONCE THEY ARRIVE HERE. BUT IT IS CURIOUS THAT HE SHOULD DIRECT HIS FIRE AT THAILAND AT A TIME WHEN MOST OBSERVERS HERE AGREE THAT THE KRIANGSAK ADMINISTRATION'S POLICY HAS RELAXED CONSIDERABLY, PARTICULARLY SINCE MARCH WHEN MORE LIBERAL IMMIGRATION POLICIES IN SOME WESTERN COUNTRIES LEFT THE THAIS FEELING LESS ISOLATED WITH INSURMOUNTABLE PROBLEMS.

10. IF HOWEVER THE THAI GOVERNMENT IS TO BE SLURRED WITH

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A REPUTATION FOR ATROCITY AND BRUTALITY, THEY WILL HAVE ALL THE LESS INCENTIVE TO TREAT THE CAMBODIANS WITH THE RELATIVE HUMANITY THEY DO. THE THAIS COULD WELL ADOPT THE EXPEDIENT OF CLOSING THEIR DOORS--WITH BAYONETS--TO ALL REFUGEES, IF INDEED MR ANDERSON'S ERRONEOUS CHARGE THAT THIS HAS ALREADY LONG BEEN ESTABLISHED POLICY BECOMES WIDELY ACCEPTED. SIGNED RICHARD NATIONS PRESIDENT OF THE FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS CLUB OF THAILAND.
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